

# *In Black and White:*

**What?**

**So What?**

**What's Next?**

(and **What Have You Done for Me Lately?**)

Approaching the Agritourism Press Release With All the Answers

### What is a Press Release?

"A press release is a formula-driven written document about something newsworthy."

*...and "News" is...?*

- An account of an event, fact, or opinion that interests people
- Anything that enough people want to read- -provided it does not violate canons of good taste and laws of libel.
- Anything **TIMELY** that interests a lot of readers
- What is **unusual** and **timely** for the citizens of the area covered by a news organization.

*The two basic categories of news stories:*

**"Hard"** News and News **"Features"**

Let us hope all the news you'll ever need to report about your farm is feature news.

***Serious news must be addressed differently from FEATURE news.***

**News Headline:**

***“Tornado and Electrical Storm Destroy Maple Lane Farm”***

**News FEATURE Headline:**

***“Visitors in a Whirl Over Maple Lane Farm’s New ‘Tennessee Twister’”***

***Let’s Practice!***

***FEATURE news can be handled with style– and SHOULD be.***

**News Headline:**

***“Tulahoma’s UT Space Center, Local Farm Form Land Partnership for New Planetarium”***

**News FEATURE Headline:**

***“Cow Jumps Over Moon At Broadman Dairy Farm– Sort Of”***

***“There is no excuse for a boring sentence.” -- Dr. Kelly Leiter, College of Communications, UT Knoxville***

***“Or headline.” – Cynthia Kent***

**Beware these space stealer and interest killers...**

- “ing” kills strength and action
- Use ACTIVE verbs and PRESENT Tense when possible

Example: “Mayor Warns Rail Strikers,” not

“Rail Strikers Warned by Mayor”

- Use “Fresh” words– avoid dull and trite

Example: “Congress Takes Aim At Gun Control,” not

“Congress to Study Gun Control ”

Let's Practice!

"Anyone who is wanting to be one of the people working on this event needs to respond back to Mr. Jones, as he is the person who is conducting this activity at our farm."

Or....

Anyone who wants to work at the benefit concert needs to contact the event coordinator, Mr. Jones.

The Tried and True Formula:

WHO: Your farm

WHAT: Your current or upcoming activity or event

WHEN: Far enough ahead of time for people to plan to go!

WHERE: General area, web address, contact info

WHY: Subjective info to explain or provide pertinent  
background for the story

The Cynthia Kent Agritourism Formula:

Who: Your farm

What: Your current upcoming activity or event

SO WHAT? This is the question your readers are silently asking you: "What's in it for ME? Why is this something I want to do or should care about?"

When: See above!

Where: This should be a standard little paragraph you plug in at the end of every release, something that over time you hope readers will learn and remember.

**The original goal of this newspaper formula:**

Newspapers have only so much space. As the paper is being “laid out,” any articles that won’t fit in the space provided will be EDITED. Thus, it is important to get the most crucial information of the release as close to the top as possible in case your ending is cut.

This is a downside to the feature article. Hard news will NOT get cut, so you’ll only get the news space that’s left over.

Make your headline strong, and your lead sentence— the first sentence of your release— just too enjoyable to read for the story to be cut. If they’re strong, and you have the rest of your important info in the right place, your release can be quickly edited to the size it has to fit.

**Some tactics to help you get your feature— free advertising— placed, and placed in its entirety :**

Take the time to make that article GOOD. Make sure you have complete sentences. Make sure everything is spelled correctly. Be consistent with your capitalization. Place the content of your story against what we’re discussing today. We’re ALL busy— newspaper editors, included. Do a careful job on your first couple of stories, and it’s possible that soon, no one will even bother to proof it— they’ll just be glad to have the story.

Provide a photograph— one with relatively close-up faces and a “cutline” or “caption” with the names of the folks in your photograph. If your photo subjects are children, include what grade they’re in and what schools they attend. The more local references, the better.

Buy an ad. Money talks. When you become a customer, you form a relationship.

Smaller, more local papers will help you out the most. They’re usually privately owned, run by non-journalists, and thrilled to have both your ad and your free content.

Let’s practice!

## **Culpepper Country Place Will Open Haunted Corn Maze on Labor Day**

**County Seat, August 15--** The new agritourism farm, Culpepper Country Place on Route Five Road, will be opening up for the first time with a new haunted themed corn maze, which will feature haunted characters like zombies, space aliens, movie monsters and many, many more scary creatures.

Joe and Paula Culpepper have been farming in Chert County for 20 years, but decided a few years ago to add agritourism to their farm which already included a beef operation and row crops. Joe is a full time farmer, and Paula is a sixth grade teacher at Chert Middle School in Braketown.

"It is very exciting and I am very glad to finally be opening this new aspect of our farm," said Mr. Culpepper. "We just feel very blessed and very fortunate to have been able to expand our operation to include an agritourism venue this year. We are hoping to see lots of people come through our farm gate and will do our very best to show them a good time. This was our daughter Amber's idea to make the corn maze haunted, so having her involved in putting this together has made putting this together a lot more fun for all of us.

"We are first and foremost a family," said Culpepper "That is why we farm, and why we continue to diversify our operation, as we hope our children will be able to stay here and farm, too, where they grew up."

The Culpepper Country Place Haunted corn maze will open to the public on September 5, 2011. The farm gates will open at 7:30 p.m. on September 5 and the cost will be \$7 per person. The maze will be open every Friday and Saturday night through September and October, plus Halloween night, which falls on a Monday this year. Those who are wanting group rates will need to call the Culpeppers at their house at 443-8946 or visit the farm internet site, [www.CulpepperCountryPlace.com](http://www.CulpepperCountryPlace.com) for that information and to make group reservations. If it has been rainy, call or visit the Internet site to check on whether or not the maze will open that night.

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## **Zombies, Aliens Infest Culpepper Farm Corn Maze**

**County Seat, August 15--** Zombies will eat your brains at the new Culpepper Country Place Haunted Corn Maze... if the aliens don't eat them first.

Starting September 5, Labor Day, Culpepper Country Place opens a haunted corn maze. Opening day hours are 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.. For the remainder of the season, the maze opens at dusk and closes at midnight every Friday and Saturday night through October, with a final Halloween night event on Monday, October 31.

The cost is \$7 per person; group rates and other reservation information including farm address and directions are available online at the farm Web site, [CulpepperCountryPlace.com](http://CulpepperCountryPlace.com). Changes in hours of operations due to inclement conditions will be posted on the Web site each day by noon.

The Culpepper family, long time residents and farmers in Chert County, say they've had so much fun creating the maze that they're already planning next year's maze and other farm related fun.

"I guess we just got tired of dealing with the corn getting infested with bugs," says farm owner Joe Culpepper, smiling, "so we just decided to let the zombies and aliens take the crop this year." Culpepper's wife Paula recommends that this year's maze is not intended for anyone under 12, but promises that next year's farm activities will include lots of child and family friendly activities on weekend afternoons.

Culpepper credits daughter Amber with the idea to let the creepy creatures inhabit the new maze. "She's a teenager, and a lot of fun," says her mother. "We figure nobody knows how to show a bunch of teenagers a good time better than a teenager. We followed her directions, and even though she's the one who gave us all the ideas, when we used her as the guinea pig for our first test run, she still came out laughing and screaming. We think that's a good sign."

Contact the Culpeppers for more information at 443-8946 or visit [CulpepperCountryPlace.com](http://CulpepperCountryPlace.com) for details.

**“When in doubt, strike it out.” – Mark Twain.**

Is Your Release.....

Efficient?

Timely?

Interesting to READ? To WHOM is it interesting– YOU? Or a “naive” reader?

“O! would some Pow’r the giftie gie us to see oursel’es as others see us. “

--Robert Burns

**Don’t let fear keep you from rushing through or skipping this important step. Well crafted words are the best fertilizer for your agritourism crop. It’s WORTH the time it takes.**

**Try these tactics:**

If you don’t know how to begin...start in the middle!

Build in “Tractor Time.” You know what I mean.

Just “talk” to the paper or computer first– meaning, write down whatever occurs to you to say about your farm or event. Don’t go back and try to fix anything until you think all the information is already down on paper. THEN start looking at ways to improve what’s already there. THEN you can look at the information critically to decide what the lead should be, what could be said in a stronger way, what could be left out and what should be added.

It’s like adjusting the timing on your truck. Even the very best mechanic couldn’t pop the hood, reach in, adjust, then slam the hood down and say, “You’re done!” It takes two people, careful attention, and several tries to get it right. **That’s just how it’s done.**

The most common mistakes I see...

- Farmers trying to sell their agritourism operations based on what’s important to THEM– not to their potential visitors.
- Inconsistencies in the writing: the more an editor has to tinker with your release, the more likely you are to lose some of your message. It doesn’t have to be perfect– but aim for consistency in capitalization, and USE Spellcheck.



- Releases that do not have an ANGLE. Each story you send out should have a different angle– that’s what makes it newsworthy.
- Stories are contemplated and planned only days – or a single day--before they’re sent out. Creative thinking– the foundation of good feature stories– cannot be rushed, although it can be trained. Part of that training includes the discipline to anticipate, mull over, and apply deadlines for releases FAR in advance– when the design for the corn maze is decided, THAT’s when to start planning how to spin that maze to the public.

**If the weather was right and you took off work to cut hay, you would not wait until the morning you climb on your tractor to be sure your machines were in good condition. You would not wait to fertilize your corn AFTER it’s already been picked. Same thing with media work: your releases are crucial tools vital to your tourism crop.**

You can do this. You didn’t learn how to play baseball the first time your siblings agreed to let you try to bat. You didn’t head to the NFL the day after your cousins let you play tag football with them out in the yard at Thanksgiving. Don’t TRY to sit down and write a great release all at one sitting, with no changes or mistakes. NOBODY can do that. That’s why people who head up newspapers are called “editors.”

**Will press releases even be relevant in 5 years?**

Who cares?

The skill set you’ll learn crafting the press release formula will teach you how to grab attention quickly, use the least number of words possible, get the most vital information out first, and learn what’s important and attractive to your customers.

In the burgeoning world of social media, all these skills will be just as important. If you inundate your tweets or Facebook pages with inane, repetitive, non-news statements, people will stop paying attention. You’ll still need a new angle every time you reach out to them.

*Finally, word on words:*

A good picture's worth a thousand of 'em.



*A night of old-fashioned fun at Smiley Hollow.*

What's the obvious story being told? What are some indirect stories being told in this same photo?

**When choosing a photo to accompany your release, keep these things in mind:**

Does this photo tell at least part of your story without words? (Action helps!)

Is there a fairly close human face in the photo?

Is the photo in sharp focus? Is the color accurate? Is the digital photo 300 dpi?

Do you get a FEELING when looking at the photo?

YOU know what's pictured in the photo, but will a non-farm viewer? Even when that photo is teeny-tiny?

How is your farm represented in the photo in indirect ways? Are fence rows weedy? Are farm buildings and animals clean and well-kept? If your farm promotes a healthy food product or activity, DO THE PEOPLE IN THE PHOTO LOOK HEALTHY AND ATTRACTIVE? Is there diversity represented?



### **A school group at Memory Lane Farm**

Obvious Story?

Any less obvious stories?

It's time to get YOUR story down in black and white....

### **Let's Practice!!!**

- It's different FROM, not different THAN. (I know I'm the only one who cares.)
- "Respond back" is redundant and also says the same thing twice.
- Try very, very, very hard not to use the word very.
- I would be very, very glad and excited and blessed to take this opportunity to remind you about using trite phrases such as these just utilized which quickly cause your readers' eyes to glaze.

Don't use some fancy -sounding word when a simple, accurate one will do: they're SIGNS, not SIGNAGE. They're WORDS, not verbage